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A2 R11

Aug. 11, 1943

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STORING SWEET POTATOES AND IRISH POTATOES

Broadcast by Charles F. Kunkle, Acting Chief, Fruit and Vegetable Branch, Food Distribution Administration; and Wallace L. Kadderly, Chief of Radio Service, in the Department of Agriculture's portion of the National Farm and Home Hour, Wednesday, August 11, 1943, over stations associated with the Blue Network.

--ooOoo--

KADDERLY: Charlie, I wonder if people really understand just how many potatoes we're likely to have this year. When we say there'll be the biggest crop of Irish potatoes on record....and a near-record crop of sweet potatoes....well, that's good news -- news that tells us the grower has really "gone to town" on production -- but it doesn't tell the whole story. If we are going to get those big crops to consumer, storing and marketing problems must be solved.

KUNKEL: Suppose you put it this way, Wallace. For every three bushels of sweet potatoes....for every five bushels of Irish potatoes....that farmers harvested last year....there'll probably be still another bushel harvested in 1943.

KADDERLY: That should help us picture the storage problem.

KUNKEL: Let's limit the discussion to sweet potatoes for the moment. Remember that even in some normal years, some of the sweet potato crop wasn't even dug. There just weren't enough good places for curing and storing it.

KADDERLY: So, with a near-record crop of sweet potatoes coming up, the question of where will we store it is a very real one.

KUNKEL: We certainly don't want to waste a good crop of sweet potatoes, Wallace. But it'll happen unless we do something about it. There's only one way we can avoid having a flooded market for sweet potatoes during the next few weeks and a scarcity next spring. That is by properly curing and storing the crop as it is harvested, and marketing it in an orderly fashion during the winter and spring. And if we do market the crop in an orderly manner the grower will get better prices, too. But there's going to be competition for the good storage space. That's why we keep saying: if you're going to need storage space for sweet potatoes....go get it now.

KADDERLY: But you can't use just any old place for storage, can you?

KUNKEL: No, you can't. Here's what happens when you do. When sweet potatoes are harvested they're very perishable. They haven't been cured, and they don't keep well unless they are cured. But most southern farmers haven't the facilities for curing them, and they often sell them as fast as they're harvested. When they don't sell them right off they usually store them in earth mounds. But this year additional storage space will be needed.

KADDERLY: Does that mean we have to build a lot of new warehouses?

KUNKEL: Not at all. Wise farmers are looking around for really suitable buildings....buildings that will do a satisfactory curing as well as storing job.

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They're using abandoned buildings on their own farms or in nearby villages. An old garage, a vacant store, an empty tobacco barn... anything like that would do, as long as it's frostproof, has a strong floor, and the temperature, ventilation, and humidity can be carefully regulated. For curing sweet potatoes the temperature has to be around 85 degrees for ten days; then you let it go down to around 50 for storage. Most places, that means having a stove or an oil heater.

KADDERLY: With the better prices you mentioned for marketing sweet potatoes later in the season, curing and storing them properly sounds like good business.

KUNKEL: It's even better business than that. Sweet potato growers have the chance to build up a new market now for their produce. Many people -- especially in the north and west -- never used to eat sweet potatoes. Now with shortages of other foods they're learning to like them. After the war they'll go on eating them. So it's worth the effort to clean, cure and store sweet potatoes properly.

KADDERLY: With this talk of so many potatoes, town and city families probably wonder whether they can store them for their own family use over the winter.

KUNKEL: Wallace, as far as sweet potatoes are concerned, I wouldn't advise those families to buy up a lot and try to store them over the winter. It's too tricky to regulate the temperature and the humidity, and they might easily rot. Irish potatoes can be stored, however, by anyone who has a cool -- but not cold -- basement. The way these families can really help most is by eating a lot more of both kinds of potatoes when they are plentiful.

KADDERLY: We've talked mostly about sweet potatoes -- but shouldn't farmers be thinking about how they're going to store their crop of Irish potatoes?

KUNKEL: That'll come along next, and they certainly should begin thinking right now. For information on the best storage for either sweet or Irish potatoes in a given locality, I suggest that growers get in touch with their county agent or state college of agriculture. They'll know what's the best sort of storage to have to meet local conditions.

KADDERLY: Thank you Charlie Kunkel for this emphasis on the need for making plans for storing the big crops of Irish and sweet potatoes coming up.

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